DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 304 099 IR 013 637

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TITLE Concern about Ethics and Ethical Issues among Professors of Instructional Systems Design and Technology.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Technology; *Ethics; Higher Education; Professional Associations; Questionnaires; Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes; *Values
IDENTIFIERS *Association for Educational Communications Tech

ABSTRACT

With a growing awareness of the importance of ethical issues in the profession of educational communications and technology, the Professional Ethics Committee of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) decided to assess the current thinking of association members toward ethics in the field. The committee wished to conduct research in which a broad base of data might be collected that could reflect membership positions in at least three areas: (1) the degree to which members feel ethics to be important and address them; (2) specific issues deemed to be important; and (3) ways in which an ethical code might be applied. Using a nine-question open-ended questionnaire, a preliminary survey was conducted at a May 1987 meeting of 80 professors of instructional systems design and technology, many of whom were members of AECT. Answers to the responses from the 43 professors who participated in the survey were tallied and analyzed. It was found that, as a group, the respondents perceive that they address ethical issues in a variety of ways, but that more needs to be done; the range of issues identified was quite broad, ranging from the effects of technology on learners in general to the effects on whole cultures; and, although they are concerned about ethical issues, as a group they do not feel that monitoring of practicing professionals is necessary. This paper includes a copy of the questionnaire, an analysis of the responses to each question, and a summary of the results. (CGD)

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Concern About Ethics And Ethical Issues Among Professors Of Instructional Systems Design And Technology

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IR013637

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Concern About Ethics And Ethical Issues Among Professors Of Instructional Systems Design And Technology

BACKGROUND

At The Annual Meeting of The Association for Educational Communications and Technology--1987, the Professional Ethics Committee agreed that some assessment of the current thinking of AECT members toward ethics and educational technology was needed since this sort of information was not available and since ethical issues around educational technology are likely to become more pronounced as technological capacity increases.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It was decided that the Committee would conduct research in which a broad base of data might be collected and that the data could reflect membership positions in at least three areas: 1. The degree to which members felt ethics to be important and address them, 2. Specific issues deemed of importance, 3. Ways in which an ethical code might be applied.

METHOD

It was decided that a May, 1987 gathering of professors of instructional systems design and technology could be used for collecting some initial data. At this gathering several dozen professors, most of whom are members of AECT, meet informally to discuss issues about educational technology. The professors represent many colleges and universities around both the United States and Canada.

We decided that an open-ended survey would be an appropriate instrument because of the range of responses it could elicit and because it would allow for development of an instrument. The survey would be preliminary in nature because the professors represent only a portion of the AECT membership, the whole of which we are interestd in assessing.

Subsequently, we arranged for time to administer a survey and constructed the nine questions in Appendix A. Questions 1, 3, and 4 required scaled responses; question 2 required selecting from among five choices (which included an "other" option), question 7a required a "yes" or "no" response; questions 5, 6, 7b and c, 8, and 9 required open-ended answers.

The survey was administered at the May meeting. The professors were given a brief introduction to the purpose and scope of the survey and to directions for completing it. They had approximately 15 minutes in which to give their answers.

DATA ANALYSIS

Responses for questions 1, 3, and 4 were analyzed simply by finding the statistical mean.

Responses for question 2a, b, c, d were analyzed by finding the percentage of responses addressing issues in the way listed.

Question 7a was analyzed by recording the number of "yes," "no," or "other" responses and figuring the percentage of the total number of responses.

Responses for questions 2e, 5, 6, 7b and c, 8, and 9 were analysed by concensus-building. For each question, each of the three investigators sorted all responses into categories of similar or same responses and captioned the categories. For instance, if 12 of 44 responses on an item were "copyright infringement" or "plagiarism," or something similar, the 12 responses became one category. Then, one investigator merged the categories sorted by each of the three investigators into a single set of categories. This version was checked with the other two investigators, and a final version was agreed on. This procedure was followed for all open-ended questions.

RESULTS

Of the 80 professors attending the meeting, 43 responded, though the number of responses for individual items varies as noted in parentheses.

1. To what degree do you address ethical issues about educational technology in your work?

not at all to a great degree
1 2 3 4 5

Result: X = 3.5 (43)

2. If you do, in what ways do you address ethical issues?

Result:

a. Teaching:	84%	(36)
b. Professional committees:	23%	(10)
c. Scholarship:	37%	(16)
d. Instructional materials development:	28%	(12)
e. Other:	23%	(10)

For **2e.**, the categories of responses are:

* Copyright (2)
* By example (2)
* Research (2)
* Consultation (2)
* Editorial activities (1)
* Guest lecturer (1)

3. To what degree do you perceive a need for you to address more fully ethical issues related to educational technology?

not at all to a great degree
1 2 3 4 5

Result: X = 3.33 (43)

4. To what degree do you perceive a need for professors of educational technology generally to address ethical issues related to educational technology?

not at all to a great degree
1 2 3 4 5

Result: X = 3.9 (43)

5. If you perceive any, what ethical issues do you think most need attention? (List more than three if you desire.)

Result: 78 separate issues were named by 43 respondents. Though many issues overlap, the emphases in the responses appeared to fall into the following categories (examples of the kinds of specific issues named follow the category):

* OWNERSHIP: copyright infringement; plagiarism; giving graduate students credit for their contributions.
* ISSUES IN WORK WITH NON-EDUCATION CLIENTELE: needs assessments conflicting with "agencies" expectations; "designing instruction for military use"; "consulting."
* TREATMENT OF STUDENTS: "confidentiality"; "manipulation of persons via instruction, e.g., design"; "loss of learner control."
* MISREPRESENTATION OF TECHNOLOGICAL CAPABILITIES: the differences between the "promise and the reality" of instructional technology; the "exaggeration of benefits--especially computers."
* INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT/DESIGN ISSUES: the problems of "I.D. for non-instructional problems"; "pre-design vs. individualization"; "letting design 'slide,' succumbing to high-tech."
* SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES: "the effects of technology in society--the limits of knowledge--the loss of liberal arts"; "the expertise of technology and its impact upon other cultures--e.g., American Somoa and ITV."
* ACADEMIC/POLITICAL ISSUES: "academic freedom vs. quality control"; "'principles' vs. campus politics."
* RESEARCH ISSUES: falsification of data; subjects' permission; "biomedical research" related to learning.
* ETHICAL ISSUES PER SE: "inclusion of ethics-related content in courses"; "self and colleague monitoring of researchers and practitioners in the field"; "approaches to an ethical code."

* VALUES TRANSMISSION: "values implied by particular sorts of instruction"; the sexism and racism "embedded in instructive products/literature."
* HONESTY IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: "honesty/truth in personal relationships."

6. What ethical issues/dilemmas do your students face? Please be as specific as possible about dilemmas, settings, people, etc.

Result: A total of 53 separate issues were named by 43 respondents. Some were very similar to those received for the previous question. Here, too, there was much overlapping of responses. The following categories emerged (examples of the kinds of specific issues named follow the category):

* OWNERSHIP: plagiarism; copyright infringement.
* ISSUES IN WORK WITH NON-EDUCATION CLIENTELE: holding ground against a client's wish to get it out, when the work is incomplete or inaccurate; "work for the Defense Dept."; "consultation."
* RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES: challenging those who represent the field; competition; "service roles."
* TREATMENT OF STUDENTS: "the whole idea of monitoring student response via methods and techniques related to technology."
* INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT/DESIGN ISSUES: "predesigning and individualization"; effects of design on limiting rather than expanding instruction.
* SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES: "problems created by technology."
* RESEARCH ISSUES: knowingly reporting inaccurate data and analyses.
* VALUES: including, use of biased materials; "technology vs humanistic values"; career decisions--"selling out".

7a. Should those in the field of educational technology monitor its practicing professionals?

Result: There were a total of 30 responses from 43 respondents, with percentages for each as follows:

Yes = 40% (12). No = 50% (15). Other = .10% (3)

7b. Who should be monitored (profesors, AECT members generally, etc.).

Result: There were 15 responses from 43 respondents. The following categories emerged:

* Everyone associated with AECT
* Professors
* Ethics violators
* Volunteers
* No one

7c. How do you suggest monitoring, if you think it should be done?

Result: There were 19 responses from 43 respondents. The following categories emerged:

* Through formal structures such as AECT Ethics Committee, a review board, a forum.
* Through program [educational technology?] reviews.
* Locally, through university ethics committees.
* Informally, only through publication of a code and peer pressure.
* Not at all.

8. What other items might be included in this survey?

Result: There were 12 responses by 43 respondents. The following categories emerged:

* What are specific problems encountered?
* How can ethical issues be raised, discussed, taught?
* What are appropriate standards?
* What is the relationship between cognitive structure and ethical decision-making?
* How should ethical disputes be handled in legal processes?
* What is our legal liability?

9. Other comments?

Result: No comments were made.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

As a group, the professors perceive that they address ethical issues about educational technology in their work at least moderately (3.26 on scale of 5). They do so in a variety of ways, but particularly in their teaching. However, they apparently are not complacent about their attention to ethical issues because they perceive a need to do a moderate amount (3.33) more in the way of addressing ethical issues. Similary, they perceive a need (3.9) for professors in general to address ethical issues.

The range of issues the professors identified as needing attention is quite broad. As a group, they are aware of at least 11 kinds of issues, ranging from the effects of technology on learners generally to the effects on whole cultures. Their perceptions of issues facing their own students is also broad, there being at least 8 kinds of issues, including students' struggles to work conscienciously with non-education clientele to social-cultural problems created by technology.

The professors' concern about and recognition of ethical issues does not, however, lead them to conclude that monitoring of those in the field is necessary. Of 30 responses, only about 12 suggest that we should monitor our practicing professionals. And only 15 responses suggested that anyone at all should be monitored. Those 15 mostly suggested monitoring everyone in AECT through a variety of means from formal structures such as The Professional Ethics Committee to peer pressure.

CONCLUSION

No more analysis of the results or conclusions will be offered here. That may best be done by the Professional Ethics Committee upon its review of the results and the instrument.

However, the following questions/comments are suggested to help guide analyses:

* What does only moderate (Is it only moderate?) interest of the professors about addressing issues and monitoring imply about AECT membership as a whole?

* Is it valid to summarize the issues into categories. Do we loose specific information provided by individual responses?

* What do the issues imply for a code of ethics?

* In some cases, the answers do not make clear exactly how people understand that there is an issue. For instance, what does it mean when a respondent says that "consulting with military/research with military" is an issue that most needs attention.

The form of the instrument is fine for a preliminary study, but it might be too cumbersome to use with all members of AECT. We would get several thousand separate responses to analyse. Also, frequency counts on some items might be more manageable, and the professors' suggestions for additional survey items could be useful.

Appendix A
Survey Questions

1. To what degree do you address ethical issues about educational technology in your work?

not at all to a great degree
1 2 3 4 5

2. If you do, in what ways do you address ethical issues?

a. Teaching
b. Professional committees
c. Scholarship
d. Instructional materials development
e. Other:_____

3. To what degree do you perceive a need for you to address more fully ethical issues related to educational technology?

not at all to a great degree
1 2 3 4 5

4. To what degree do you perceive a need for professors of educational technology generally to address ethical issues related to educational technology?

not at all to a great degree
1 2 3 4 5

5. If you perceive any, what ethical issues do you think most need attention? (List more than three if you desire)

a.
b.
c.

6. What ethical issues/dilemmas do your students face? Please be as specific as possible about dilemmas, settings, people, etc.

a.
b.
c.
etc.

7a. Should those in the field of educational technology monitor its practicing professionals? _____

7b. Who should be monitored (profesors, AECT members generally, etc.)_____

7c. How do you suggest monitoring, if you think it should be done?

8. What other items might be included in this survey?

9. Other comments?